

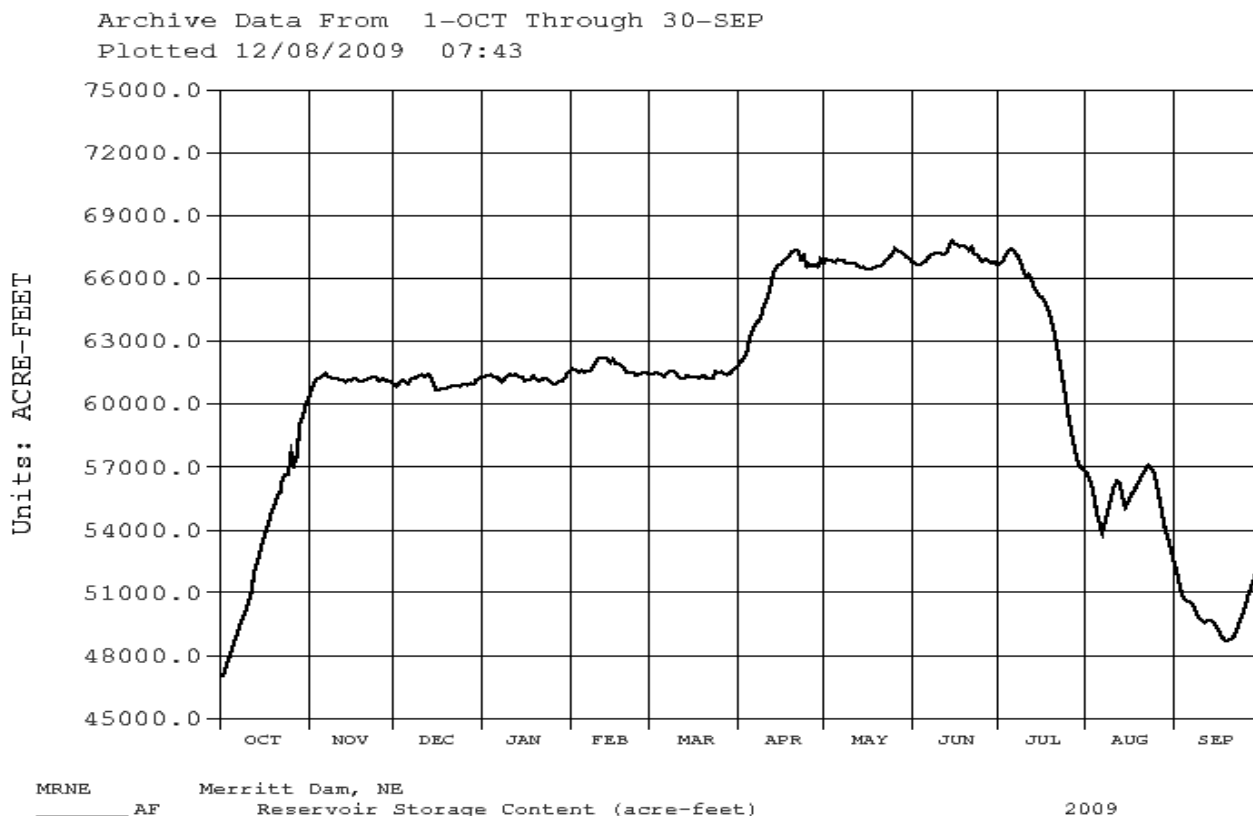


Merritt Reservoir 2009 Fall Survey Summary

Nebraska Game and Parks Commission
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The following text and graphs are the result of netting surveys completed during October 2009 at Merritt reservoir. For comparative purposes it also shows the results from previous years. Fish populations are sampled each year at Merritt using gill nets, a method used to sample open-water fish such as walleye, white bass, and channel catfish. The nets are set each year at approximately the same locations and dates as previous years to allow for trend comparisons.

Merritt reservoir covers 2, 905 acres and can store 74, 486 acre-feet of water. The reservoir fills each year with flows from the Boardman and Snake arms of the lake. A graph showing fluctuations in lake levels over the last year can be seen below.

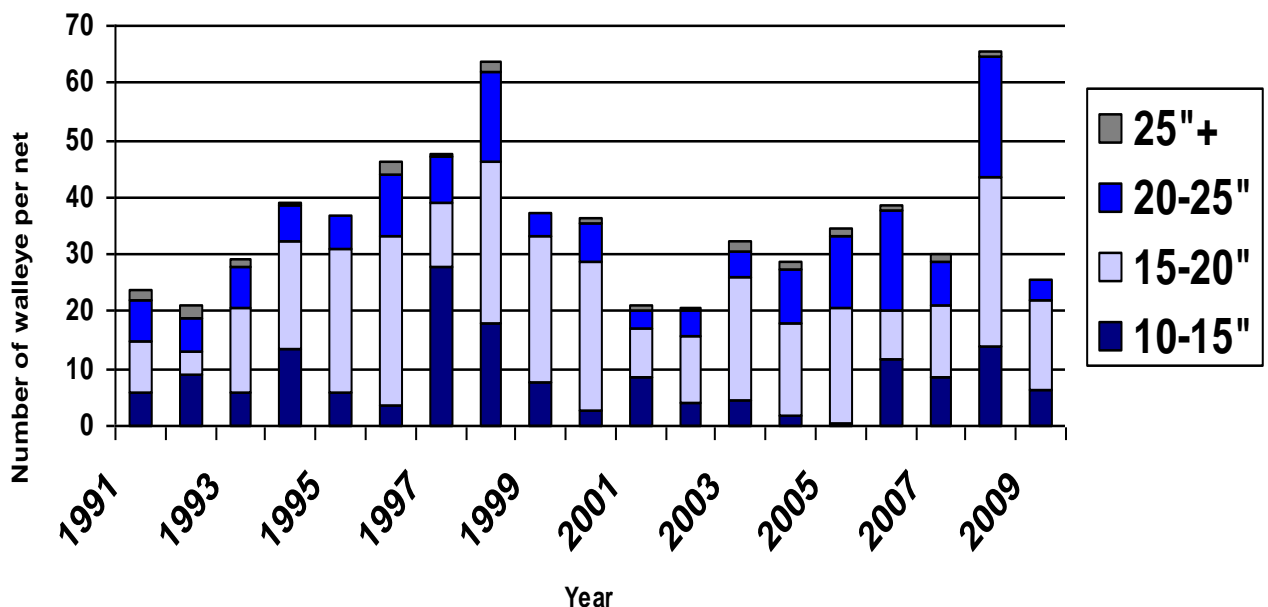


Walleye

Walleye fishing was excellent at Merritt during 2009. An estimated 82% of the anglers that fished Merritt targeted walleye. Anglers at Merritt are allowed to harvest one walleye between 15 and 18 inches, while the rest of the bag must be over 18 inches long (it is allowable to have all the fish in the bag over 18 inches). A statewide regulation allows anglers to harvest only one walleye larger than 22 inches in the daily bag limit of four walleye.

The walleye gill net catch in 2009 was 25.5 fish per net and fell below the 35.7 fish per net average since 1991. Of the fish sampled in 2009, 73 % of them were larger than the statewide minimum length limit of 15 inches and approximately 13 % of them were between 20-25 inches. Nine different year classes were surveyed and the average size of walleye collected was 16.8 inches. Merritt reservoir is stocked annually with 142,250 fingerling walleye (2 inches) in June to maintain the population. This is a stocking rate of 50 fish per acre.

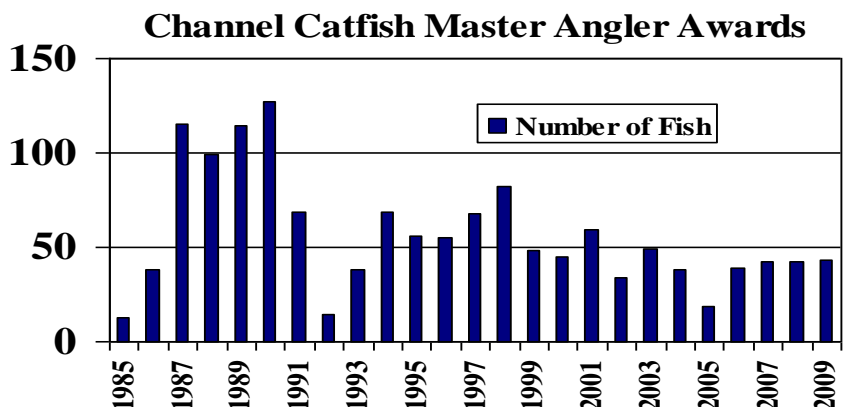
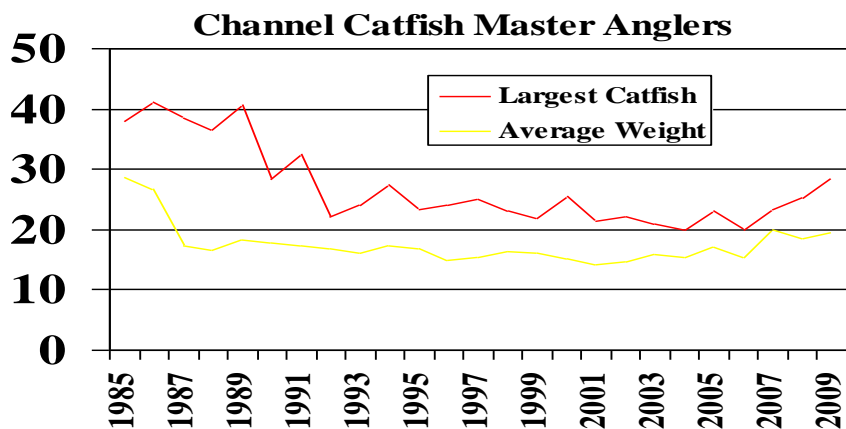
Walleye Gill Net Catch



Channel Catfish

Merritt Reservoir has always been one of the top places for anglers to fish for trophy catfish. Merritt holds the Nebraska state record channel catfish which was caught in 1986 and weighed 41.5 pounds. Graphs showing the number of awards, the largest fish entered each year, and the average weight of the catfish entered can be seen below. These graphs show a slight increase in the size of the largest catfish caught which weighed 28.5 pounds. Master angler awards have been steady for the past few years averaging 42 entries per year.

Net catches are typically low in Merritt averaging about 1-2 fish per net. Special regulations were put into affect in 2009. This regulation allows anglers to have 5 fish in their daily bag instead of 10 fish. These regulations potentially should allow some of these fish to reach trophy size. The population is maintained through an annual stocking of 14,250 (9 inch) channel catfish in September.



Muskellunge and Northern Pike

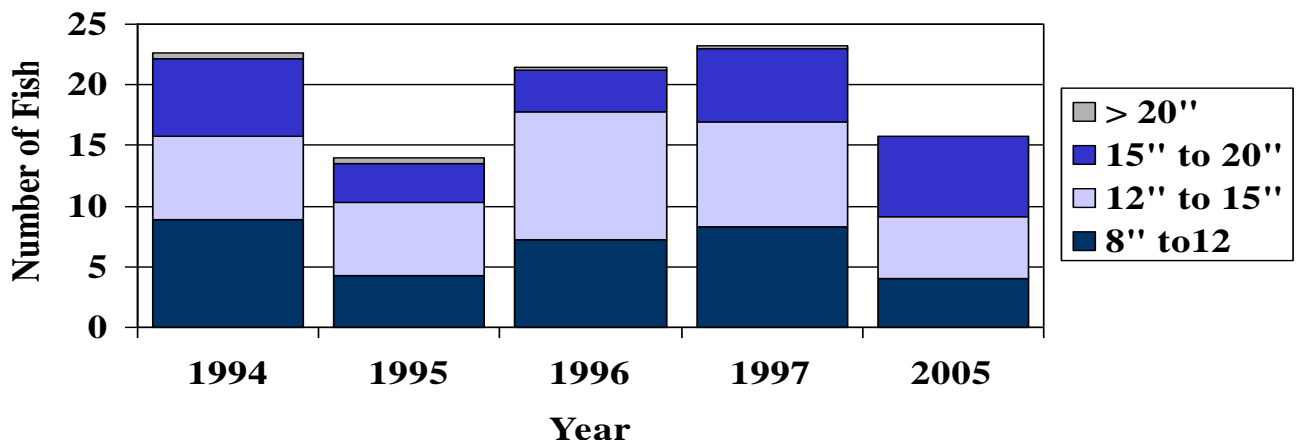
Merritt Reservoir is one of the top places in Nebraska for anglers to target a trophy muskellunge. The state record muskellunge was caught at Merritt in 1992 and weighed 41.5 pounds. Estimates of angler catches in 2009 was 150 fish caught and 7 of those fish were harvested. Muskellunge are difficult to sample in our standard surveys but are generally collected during the spring walleye egg collections. In the spring of 2009, several muskellunge were collected and released. One of those fish collected was 47 inches and weighed approximately 35 pounds. Muskellunge are stocked in Merritt every three years.

Northern pike are present in Merritt reservoir but numbers remain low. During 2009 approximately 1,700 fish were caught by anglers and 841 of those fish were harvested and averaged 27.9 inches. Pike over 10 pounds are not uncommon.

Largemouth and Smallmouth Bass

Both of these species are found in Merritt Reservoir but numbers remain low. However historic electrofishing data shows excellent size structure for largemouth bass. Estimates of angler catches for smallmouth bass in 2009 was 1045 fish caught and 971 of those fish were released. The smallmouths that were released averaged approximately 9 inches. In 2010 night-time electrofishing will be completed to compare with historical data.

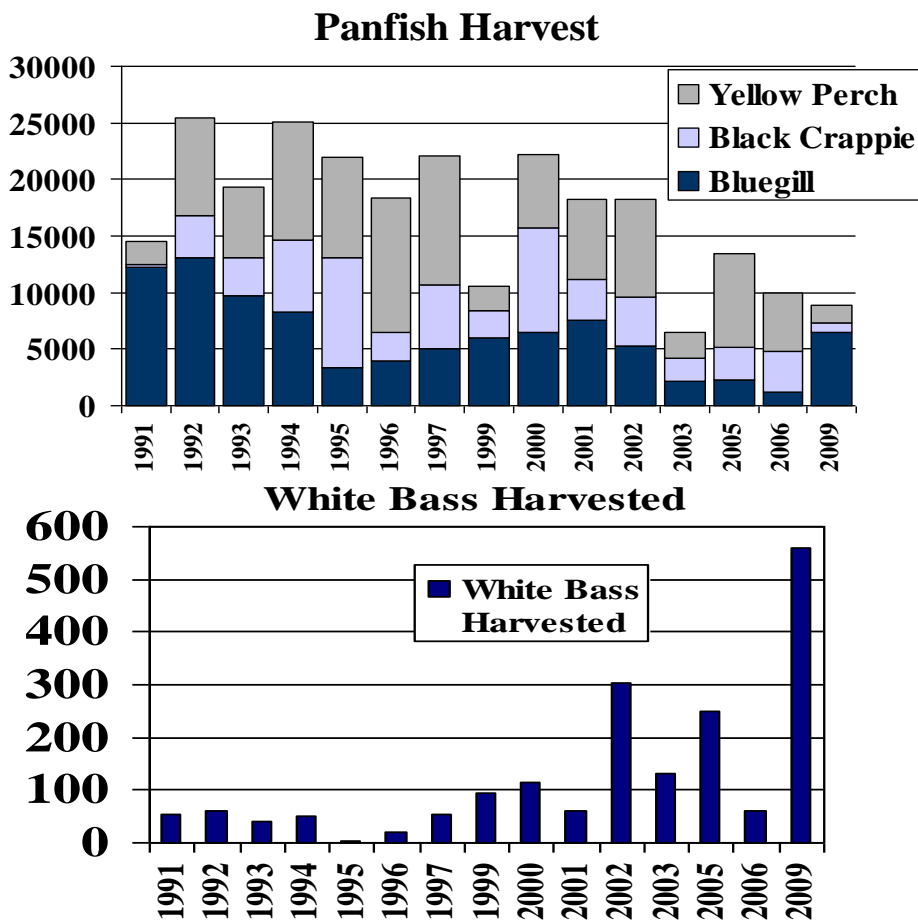
Largemouth Bass Catch Per Hour



Panfish

Black crappie, bluegill, and yellow perch are all present in Merritt reservoir. Black crappie are generally caught during the early spring spawning period or through the ice during the winter months. Bluegill and yellow perch can be caught year round and especially in the late summer months when other species can be tough to find. A chart showing historical creel harvest of these panfish species can be seen below.

White bass numbers remain low in Merritt. Only one white bass per gill net was sampled in the 2009 survey. Those fish averaged approximately 16.3 inches and 2.3 pounds. Current plans are to stock 120,000, 2-inch white bass in July of 2010 to supplement the population. A chart showing historical creel harvest of white bass in Merritt reservoir can be seen below.



For additional information about fisheries management at Merritt Reservoir, please contact the following NGPC personnel by phone or email addresses listed below.

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